

Disposable Gloves: Latex Sensitivity

Latex gloves provide a primary form of protection against the hazards of blood borne pathogens and their mode of transmission. Many gloves for medical and laboratory use are made of natural rubber latex (NRL). NRL is a highly durable and flexible material that provides a high measure of protection against pathogens and environmental contaminants.

Although NRL has become the material of choice for hand protection in many industries, some people have reported certain irritations and/or adverse reactions associated with the use of latex gloves, which typically manifest themselves in the form of **irritation**, or **delayed hypersensitivity (Type IV)**, or **immediate hypersensitivity (Type I)**.

Irritation

– Irritant Contact Dermatitis

Description: Non-allergic response, usually due to insufficient rinsing of area in contact with NRL product. Irritation can also be caused by residues of processing chemicals used in the manufacture. It is important to note that this condition can be confused with a condition caused by a variety of other chemicals often found in other products, and is not exclusive to NRL. Examples of agents that may cause irritation are skin cleansing agents, disinfecting agents, and preservatives.

Symptoms: Typically, reddening of the skin, or a rash on the skin that tends to be dry and itchy. The onset of this response can occur within minutes or within hours of coming into contact with an NRL product.

Areas of body affected: Typically affects the area of the body in direct contact with the NRL product. There is no evidence of a potential for systemic involvement.

What should be done: You should consider using powder-free gloves which may help reduce your irritation. Consult your doctor if symptoms persist.

Delayed Hypersensitivity (Type IV) – Allergic Contact Dermatitis and Chemical Allergy

Description: Cell-mediated allergic response to residual accelerating and/ or processing agents used in the manufacturing process of latex products. This type of allergy is similar to that of poison oak.

Symptoms: The severity of this type of response is extremely varied. Reactions normally affect the skin and can cause a red rash, small blisters, dry thickened (leathery) skin, crusting, scabbing sores, and peeling. The onset of this response is delayed, typically occurring between 6 to 48 hours after contact.

Areas of body affected: May not be limited to the area in direct contact with the NRL product.

What should be done: If you suspect you have an allergy to the agents used to manufacture NRL gloves, consult your doctor before continuing the use of NRL products, and ask for advice regarding the use of alternative gloves, such as powder-free NRL, or synthetic gloves.



Immediate Hypersensitivity

(Type I) – Protein Allergy,
Immunoglobulin E (IgE) Mediated Response

Description: Allergic response to the residual water extractable proteins found on finished natural latex devices. These proteins originate from the rubber tree (*Hevea brasiliensis*).

Symptoms: The severity of this type of response is extremely varied, and can be potentially serious. Symptoms include local or generalised urticaria, rhinitis, conjunctivitis, asthma, or anaphylaxis. The onset of this response is immediate, typically occurring within minutes of contact, but may also occur hours later. Studies indicate that there is a potential risk for systemic involvement.

Areas of body affected: May not be limited to the area in direct contact with the NRL product.

What should be done: Studies have shown that users of NRL products who suffer from immediate onset hypersensitivity (Type I) are generally atopic, and typically already exhibit allergies to a number of other substances. If you have experienced any of the reactions listed above or suspect that you may be susceptible to latex allergy, discontinue the use of NRL gloves immediately, and notify your supervisor. You must also consult your doctor to determine your risk and the potential severity of the condition. Only your doctor/allergist can determine if you are latex sensitive.

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